






Dealing with Children's Behaviors

Activity 9-1	What's New?	 10-15 minutes
Activity 9-2	Looking Back, Looking Ahead	 25-30 minutes
Activity 9-3	Punishment or Discipline?	 15-20 minutes
Activity 9-4	What Do You Do?	 30-40 minutes
Activity 9-5	Feedback/Wrap-up	 10-15 minutes

Key Concepts

- The participants' own childhood experiences with discipline, punishment, and abuse will influence how they deal with their children.
- Both punishment and abuse are negative ways of managing children's behavior. Parents need to find effective alternatives to hitting.
- Abuse is totally inappropriate and unacceptable. It is also illegal.
- Parents need to understand what their children are trying to accomplish through their behavior, and they need to respond in ways that are appropriate to the child's specific age.
- Discipline is effective in teaching children themselves to control their behavior.

Materials Checklist

Activity 9-2 **Looking Back, Looking Ahead**

- Newsprint
 - Marker
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Activity 9-3 **Punishment or Discipline?**

- Leader Resource, “Discipline, Punishment, and Abuse”
 - Newsprint
 - Marker
-

Activity 9-4 **What Do You Do?**

- Leader Resources, “Game Situations” and “Role-Play Situations”
- Handout, “Age Makes a Difference”
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Index cards (optional)

What's New?

Begin by asking the fathers how they are doing today. Then ask the following questions to discuss their reactions to the last session.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Have any of you taken care of your children since the last session? If so, how did it go?
2. Did any of you try the group's suggestions about how to improve visits with your children? If so, which suggestions did you try? What happened?
3. Did anybody try the inexpensive or free things that the group came up with last week? If so, what things did you do? What happened?
4. Do you have any questions or concerns about your children that you'd like to share?

Tell the fathers that today's session will focus on managing children's behavior in ways that help them do what's right. Say something like, "Today, we'll identify ways to correct or manage your children's behavior without yelling, hitting, or responding in other forceful or abusive ways. All children have trouble behaving at times; and all parents get frustrated in their efforts to raise them. Once again, remember to be supportive of each other as we share ideas about dealing with children's behavior."

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Purpose: To have participants identify how they were disciplined when they were children. To examine how their childhood experiences with discipline affect their parenting style today. To help the fathers learn effective alternatives to hitting as they attempt to change or correct their children's behavior.

Materials: Newsprint and marker.

Time: 30 minutes.

Planning Note: This activity may stir up participants' feelings. Be prepared for this, and be sensitive to both individual and group dynamics. People who were abused as children often have difficulty disciplining their own children as parents. If a participant needs help in learning how to be an effective parent, consider referring him to counseling or parenting classes. Agencies such as the YMCA, the Urban League, and other United Way organizations may provide parenting classes. Also check whether your community has Parents Anonymous, a self-help group for parents who are concerned about the way they respond to their children's behavior or who are abusive and need to learn alternative ways to discipline their children.

Procedure: Tell the group that today's session will focus on ways to deal with children's misbehavior. Ask the fathers to identify some of their children's behaviors that cause problems, and post their list on newsprint. (If you have already talked about this, post the list to remind them of the kinds of behaviors that cause them concern. Just take a few minutes for this.)

Next, ask the fathers to get into a comfortable position and to think about some time in their childhood when a parent or a relative corrected their behavior. Help the fathers to recall the details of their experiences by asking the following questions.

- How old were you?
- Where were you?
- What were you doing?
- How did the adult respond? (Did he or she respond physically, with words, or with silence?)
- How did you feel about this experience?
- What did you learn from this experience?

Tell the fathers that in a couple of minutes they will be asked to share their experiences with the group. Then allow a few minutes of quiet time, and ask the men to tell their stories. First, model the process by sharing an experience from your own childhood: describe the incident and your feelings about it at the time. When everyone has talked about a similar experience, ask the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. In general, how did your parents or caregiver try to manage your behavior? (Comment about the differences in family styles of discipline.)
2. Did your parent or caregiver say anything to you about the way he or she was managing your behavior? (For example, did the adult say things like, “I’m going to make sure you never forget what I said”; “This hurts me more than it hurts you”; or “I’m disappointed in you.”)
3. What feelings does this activity raise in you? Do you feel like an adult or like a child?
4. Do you think that your parents’ or caregiver’s style of discipline has influenced how you deal with your own children when they misbehave? (For example, do you tend to respond to your children’s misbehavior in the same way that you were treated? Or do you respond differently, because you didn’t like the way you were treated?)
5. What specific problems have you had in managing your children’s behavior?
6. How do you feel when your children don’t listen to you?
7. Does being a noncustodial parent affect how you deal with your children? If so, how? (For example, are you more lenient with your children because you don’t see them everyday? Do your children react differently to your demands and expectations than they do to their mother’s?)
8. If your children did this activity 15 years from now, what do you think they would say about how you corrected their behavior?

Punishment or Discipline?

Purpose: To clarify, define, and understand the terms discipline and punishment. To help fathers understand the meaning of abuse.

Materials: Leader Resource, “Discipline, Punishment, and Abuse”; newsprint and marker.

Time: 20 minutes.

Planning Note: Draw a line to divide a sheet of newsprint into two columns, and label them “Punishment” and “Discipline.” Post the newsprint, and prepare a list of two or three situations that the fathers have shared in which they had to manage their children’s behavior (or use the examples given below).

Procedure: Explain to the participants that this activity will examine two different philosophies of managing children’s behavior: *punishment* and *discipline*. Ask the men to explain how punishment and discipline are different. Say something like, “When you think of the word *punishment*, what words or actions come to mind?” (Responses are likely to include hitting, yelling, taking away privileges, grounding the child, etc.) Now ask them to think of the word *discipline* and again ask what words or actions come to mind. (Examples may include teaching, praising, correcting negative or wrong behavior, reinforcing good behavior, etc.) Now tell the fathers to recall the incidents they described in Activity 9.2 (if possible, post the newsprint from that activity). Finally, ask them to think about whether their examples consist of discipline or punishment, or whether they are something else (such as *abuse*: inflicting pain or injury on a child, putting a child down, making a child feel bad about himself or herself, etc.).

In your own words, explain that *discipline* teaches children how to act; discipline should make sense to children, and should have something to do with what they have done wrong. Discipline helps children to feel good about themselves. It gives them a chance to correct their mistakes, and it puts them in control of their actions.

(The word *discipline* and the word *disciple* both come from the same Latin word meaning “pupil”; in this context, then, *discipline* means following the guidance of someone who “teaches.”)

In contrast, *punishment* tells children only that they have been bad; it does not tell them what to do instead. Punishment often doesn’t make sense to children, because it usually doesn’t have anything to do with what the children have done wrong.

Abuse hurts a child physically and emotionally; it encourages children to grow up feeling bad about themselves and others.

Based on this discussion and the Leader Resource “Discipline, Punishment, and Abuse,” add to the newsprint list of characteristics of discipline and punishment. Explain that you are going to give the group two or three examples of situations that parents face with their children. Then present situation 1 (below), and ask, “How might a father punish Michelle in this situation? How might he discipline or teach her?” Record the fathers’ ideas about punishment and discipline in this case, and add ideas from the suggested responses below.

SITUATION 1. Your three-year-old-daughter, Michelle, wants to be with you while you are cooking dinner, but she keeps running toward the stove.
How do you handle the situation?

Punishment: Yell at Michelle, and drag her out of the kitchen.

Discipline: Tell Michelle *firmly* that, if she wants to stay with you in the kitchen, she must not go near the stove, because it is hot and she could hurt herself. If she continues to play near the stove, lead her by the hand to another room. Tell her she can come back to the kitchen and try again in five minutes.

Continue the discussion by asking the following questions:

- What results would the punishment response have? (Michelle may stay out of the kitchen out of *fear*, but she will not understand why it is dangerous to go near the stove.)
- What results would the discipline response have? (Michelle would learn that the stove is hot and can hurt her.)
- How much control should parents expect a three-year-old to have? (For example, can a three-year-old remember *every time* to stay away from the stove?)

Make the point that three-year-olds are little children who are just learning the rules and the way that the world works. They cannot be trusted to keep themselves safe, because they are still “me-focused” (that is, they think that the world revolves around them and that they can have or do whatever they want). They need constant supervision. This is normal for this stage of development, which should be kept in mind when a parent disciplines a three-year-old. Remind the fathers to think about the age of the child when they consider the other examples you will discuss.

Then present the other examples (either from the fathers’ list or from below). Use the same discussion format, and record any relevant points on the newsprint list of punishment and discipline.

SITUATION 2. Your two-year-old son, Sam, writes on the wall with a crayon.

Punishment: Tell Sam that he is a bad boy, and slap his hands.

Discipline: Take the crayons away (until the next day), and tell Sam that crayons are used in coloring books or on paper, not on walls. Explain that crayon marks make the walls dirty.

SITUATION 3. Your six-year-old daughter Maria hits her four-year-old sister with a bat.

Punishment: Yank the bat away from Maria, and send her to her room.

Discipline: Take the bat away, and tell Maria that hitting is not OK and that she has to use words to tell her sister why she is angry. Ask Maria to apologize, and tell her that she will have to go to her room if she hits her sister again.

End the activity by asking the following questions.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of punishment? (*Advantages:* Punishment is easy and fast; it keeps the adult in control; and it usually produces quick results. *Disadvantages:* Punishment teaches children the importance of power, and it shows that violence is a good way to resolve conflict; it has the potential to turn into abuse; and it does not teach children why their behavior is wrong or how to correct it.)
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of discipline? (*Advantages:* Discipline teaches and gives responsibility to the children; it is more humane than punishment; it teaches lessons about the consequences of actions, by saying, “When you do this . . . such and such will happen”; it helps children to feel good about themselves when they please others as well as themselves; and it helps children know what is expected of them so that they can feel safe. *Disadvantages:* Discipline takes more initial effort, time, patience, and creativity.)
3. When does punishment become abuse? (*Examples:* When children are pushed, kicked, choked, hit, punched, locked out of the house, abandoned in dangerous places, left home alone at young ages, or threatened or hurt with a weapon. Also talk about emotional abuse, as when parents or caregivers refuse or neglect to give children consistent love, attention, and protection; or when parents ignore, belittle, or insult children. Emphasize that abuse is unacceptable behavior for parents.)
4. Based on the way you were raised, do you think that your parents responded to your behavior in ways that helped you learn right from wrong? Why or why not? What kinds of messages did you get about yourself from the way your parents responded to your behavior? (Did you feel good or bad about yourself? Did you believe that your parents loved you? Did you fear or respect them?)
5. Now that you have considered the differences among discipline, punishment, and abuse, which method do you think is most effective in getting children to be well behaved? Why?
6. If you were to use discipline instead of hitting to handle your children’s behavior, what reactions would you expect from them? What reactions would you expect from their mothers or grandparents?

Leader Resource

Discipline, Punishment, and Abuse

Discipline

- Expresses concern in a firm but warm manner: “*You must not touch that, because you could get hurt.*”
- Focuses on the behavior that needs to change, not on the child’s personality: “I will listen to you when you stop whining and tell me what you want” instead of “You are such a whiner. Be quiet!”
- Teaches successful behavior through close, warm interactions: “I will help you pick up your toys this time, so that next time you will be able to do it yourself.”
- Gives a child a second chance to try behaving correctly: “You need to go to your room now, but you can come back and try again when you are able to calm down.”
- Is difficult in the short run but easier in the long run, as the child learns appropriate behavior and self-discipline.

Children learn ways to control their own behavior and to manage conflicts with others. (Children under the age of three or four are usually not capable of controlling their own behavior. They still need their parents to guide and protect their actions.)

Some good ways to discipline children include: making your rules and expectations clear in advance; ignoring negative behavior; setting clear limits; talking and explaining; letting the child experience natural consequences; distracting the child; holding the child; helping the child master a task; using rewards (positive consequences for doing the right thing).

Punishment (A negative consequence for doing or not doing something)

- Expresses anger and power. (The parent uses force to make the child behave, which can lead the child to fear the parent.)
- Is usually inconsistent, because it depends on the parent's mood. (This confuses children. They learn that they have to be concerned about what parents will do, instead of learning how to control their own behavior.)
- Can easily lead to physical and emotional abuse of the child. (The more the child is punished, the more he or she begins to "tune out" the parent. This often leads the parent to make an even more forceful response.)
- Is negative and focuses on failure. (The parent attempts to stop the child's behavior but doesn't provide opportunities for the child to try again.)
- Is easy or convenient in the short run but has short-lasting effects. (The child often learns how "not to get caught"; thus, behavior is often repeated when the parent is not present.)

Punishment should never be violent and should be used only as a last resort, when children do not respond to guidance. Other techniques such as time out, loss of privileges, and being grounded are far more effective in changing children's behavior.

Abuse

Abuse or neglect of children can be physical or emotional. Physical abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver inflicts pain or injury on a child. Emotional abuse occurs when parents or caregivers refuse to give children love, attention, protection, and encouragement; or when parents degrade, insult, or ignore their children. Abuse is *never* OK. Children who are abused learn that the people who love you hurt you, and that the world is a dangerous place. When people who were abused as children become parents, they tend to abuse their own children.

What Do You Do?

Purpose: To give the fathers the opportunity to identify constructive and age-appropriate ways to deal with their children's behavior.

Materials: Leader Resources, "Game Situations" and "Role-Play Situations"; handout, "Age Makes a Difference"; newsprint and markers; index cards (optional).

Time: 40 minutes.

Planning Note: Depending on the size and character of your group, choose either the game version or the role-playing version of "What Do You Do?" (both procedures are described below). Write on newsprint and post later the major points about discipline during the five stages of development, using the handout "Age Makes a Difference." If the group will do role plays, copy the Leader Resource "Role-Play Situations," putting each situation either on a separate sheet of newsprint or an index card for use with each small group.

Procedure: Whether you choose procedure 1 or procedure 2 below, begin this activity by asking the fathers, "Why do you think children misbehave?" (Likely answers include: because they want attention; because they are angry and want revenge; because they're bored; because they want power and control over the situation; because they don't know or don't accept the rules; because parents are inconsistent, so children test the limits; because children are feeling inadequate and want to express their frustration.)

Explain to the group that children's misbehavior is usually an effort to communicate something, and so it is helpful to try to figure out what lies behind the behavior. Give the example of a father whose four-year-old daughter is visiting for the weekend: On Saturday afternoon, Dad's girlfriend comes to visit; the little girl

becomes cranky, pulling on Dad and causing problems. Ask the group, “What might lie behind the child’s behavior?” (She’s jealous and wants Dad’s attention.) Ask them to suggest ways that this father can satisfy his daughter’s need for attention without allowing her to control his every move.

Review the four basic guidelines about discipline from the handout “Age Makes a Difference”:

- **Age matters.** It’s important to know what children can and cannot learn during each stage of their growth and development. Parents need to make sure that the discipline they use fits their child’s age and development.
- **The power of love.** To do a good job of teaching your children desirable behavior, you need to develop a positive emotional relationship with them. Parents need to demonstrate their love for their children through kind words and physical affection. Children can be taught that you love *them*, even if you don’t always love their *behavior*.
- **Mean it.** Parents need to be firm with their discipline so that their children know they mean what they say and will back it up.
- **Praise, praise, praise.** Recognize and make positive comments whenever your children behave well (even if it is something small). Parents often fall into the trap of commenting on their children’s behavior only when it is unacceptable.

Continue by using your newsprint chart to review the discipline hints during the six stages of development (from the handout “Age Makes a Difference”). Then tell the men that they are going to have fun as they examine some day-to-day experiences and situations with children. Explain the procedure for the activity, depending on whether the group will play a game or do role plays (see below).

Procedure 1: Game Version of “Alternatives to Hitting.” Divide the fathers into three groups: two groups of equal size (Teams A and B) and one smaller group (the judges). Give Teams A and B newsprint and markers. Explain that you will read a situation (from the Leader Resource “Game Situations”) and that the teams will have two minutes to write down as many responses as they can think of.

Explain to the judges that they will listen to each team's responses to the situation and will decide which responses are more appropriate; judges should be prepared to defend their decisions. (The judges can be changed periodically, and you may need to assist them in making their decisions.)

State the rules of the game:

- Hitting cannot be a response to the situation; the teams must find *alternatives* to violence.
- When the time is up, participants can finish their thoughts, but cannot add any responses.
- Judges will give five points to the team whose responses are more likely to handle the discipline problem effectively while also teaching the child self-control. Remind the teams that their responses should be appropriate for the child's age level.

Play the game for about 20 minutes, leaving time to ask the Discussion Questions.

Procedure 2: Role-Play Version of "Alternatives to Hitting." Have the fathers count off into groups of three. Explain that each group will be given a written situation (from the Leader Resource "Role-Play Situations") in which a father has to correct his child's behavior. Then each group will act out the situation for a few minutes. Remind the fathers that they cannot use hitting as a means of correcting behavior; they must find alternatives to violence.

Distribute the role-play situations (or, if the groups prefer, they can use real situations from their own lives). Allow the groups approximately five minutes to prepare and rehearse, and then start the first role play. After each role play, ask the players what it was like to act out that situation, and then get feedback from the whole group.

After all groups have acted out their situations, move on to the Discussion Questions.

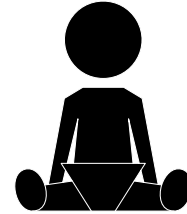
▼ Discussion Questions

1. What are the main differences between how you discipline a child who is two or three years old and one who is four or older?
2. What new ideas did you get today about how to handle your children's behavior?
3. Have any situations come up with your own children in which you expected too much, given the child's age? What happened? In what way did you expect too much?
4. What are your opinions about spanking as a form of discipline? (Some parents believe that in some situations spanking is acceptable or necessary; others do not believe that spanking is effective or good, but they sometimes do it when they are frustrated. It is important that you be nonjudgmental about the men's opinions. Emphasize the ideas about spanking that are in the handout "Age Makes a Difference.")
5. How do other people (such as your parents, your children's mother, your children's grandmother, or your girlfriend) influence your ability to manage your children's behavior?
6. How important is it for children that both their parents respond to their behavior in the same ways? What can you do to get your children's mother to cooperate with you in your efforts to discipline your children effectively?
7. How do you think that the ways you respond to your children's behavior will affect their feelings about themselves? How do your methods of disciplining them affect how they feel about you?
8. How will your methods of discipline affect your children as they get older?
9. Do fathers respond differently to their children's behavior than mothers do? If so, what is different?
10. For those of you who have part-time custody of your children, what parts of disciplining your children are easy for you? What's hard?

Questions About Game Version of “Alternatives to Hitting”

11. In which of the situations described was the behavior of the child normal for that age? (Situations 1, 4, 6, 7, 8)
12. Were the group’s responses for the infants and toddlers in situations 1 through 8 consistent with what children of these ages can handle? Why or why not?

Age Makes a Difference



There are four basic guidelines for fathers to keep in mind as they discipline their children:

- ▶ **Age matters.** It's important to know what children can and cannot learn during each stage of their growth and development. Parents need to make sure that the discipline they use fits their child's age and development.
- ▶ **The power of love.** To do a good job of teaching your children desirable behavior, you need to develop a positive emotional relationship with them. Parents need to demonstrate their love for their children through kind words and physical affection. Children can be taught that you love *them*, even if you don't always love their *behavior*.
- ▶ **Mean it.** Parents need to be firm with their discipline so that their children know that they mean what they say and will back it up.
- ▶ **Praise, praise, praise.** Recognize and make positive comments whenever your children behave well (even if it is something small). Parents often fall into the trap of commenting on their children's behavior only when it is unacceptable.

The following are some age-specific hints that can help parents deal with their children's behavior.

Birth to 7 Months

- ▶ Babies cannot help being babies. They do not understand what they have done wrong, and so they cannot be disciplined effectively. Don't try.

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8 to 14 Months

- ▶ Your baby will start to explore the rules but cannot really understand or stick to them.
- ▶ Firmly say — and if necessary repeat — “No.”
- ▶ Remove the baby from the situation, or distract the baby with a toy.
- ▶ Never leave the baby alone except in a safe place, such as a crib or playpen.

15 Months to 2 Years

- ▶ Your baby will begin to test the rules but still cannot stick to them. Most of what the child does at this age is still a *reflex*. The child cannot yet think about what will happen as a result of his or her actions.
- ▶ The best way to manage behavior problems is to remove the child from the situation or to distract the child with another activity.

2 to 3 Years

- ▶ These are the “terrible twos.” Your child will actively challenge the rules to test limits and to get attention.
- ▶ At this age, children begin to imitate; so watch your own behavior, and model the behavior that you want from the child.
- ▶ Set firm limits, and watch your child closely. Children at this age cannot yet control themselves, so you must be in charge.
- ▶ Use redirection (get the child to focus on something else) to manage your child’s behavior. When this doesn’t work, establish a “time-out” chair where your child has to sit quietly for a short period after misbehaving to help him or her get back in control. Redirection and time-outs are good responses because they do not reward the child’s behavior with attention from you. (The length of the time-out should match the child’s age. For example, a two-year-old’s time-out should be two minutes; a three-year-old’s time-out should be three minutes, etc.)
- ▶ Find ways to show your child that she or he does not have to misbehave to get your attention.

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4 to 8 Years

- ▶ Most children during these years come to understand when they have misbehaved. Although they usually are able to control their own behavior, they still need your direction and guidance.
- ▶ Explain to your child what is wrong about the behavior, say how it made you feel, and spell out what you expect in the future.
- ▶ Let your child learn from natural and logical consequences as much as possible. (An example of a *natural consequence* is when a child gets cold as a result of playing outside without a coat; an example of a *logical consequence* is when a parent takes the child's toy away for a day because the child left it in the middle of the living-room floor.)

9 to 11 Years

- ▶ During these years, children should be getting better at managing their own behavior. They know the difference between right and wrong, and they can understand that their behavior has consequences.
- ▶ Be clear about expectations, and decide on consequences in advance. (For example, if your child's bedtime on Friday night is nine o'clock and the child refuses to go to bed on time, he or she will lose the privilege of staying up late next Friday.)
- ▶ The most effective way to handle misbehavior at these ages is to talk about what the child did wrong and why it was wrong.
- ▶ Growing children continue to need praise and positive reinforcement so that they can feel good about themselves. Being there for your children when they need someone to talk with will prevent many situations from becoming problems.

12 to 18 years

- ▶ By the time your children are teenagers, they know the difference between right and wrong. They are also at an age where they will be spending more time away from your protection and guidance.
- ▶ Good communication is essential to your relationship with your teen. Establish a particular time every day when the two of you will talk about how things are going.

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- ▶ Try not to preach to your children. They are now likely to turn to their peers and other adults for advice, so get to know the people who are important to them.
- ▶ Limit rules to those that are necessary for your child's safety.
- ▶ Be clear about your expectations for behavior, and follow through with logical consequences for misbehavior. (For example, tell your 17-year-old daughter that if she misses her curfew, she will not be allowed to go out the next night.)

A Word About Spanking

Experts disagree about the issue of spanking children; some say that spanking is necessary, while others say that it is abusive. Parents have to make their own decision. Before spanking a child to control behavior, first think about the following:

- ▶ Do not spank children who are less than two years old.
- ▶ Be aware of your own adult strength and the fact that physical punishment can become abuse.
- ▶ Spanking does not teach children what they *should* do; it may teach them only what *not* to do.
- ▶ Before you resort to spanking a child, try to figure out alternative ways to teach appropriate behavior.
- ▶ Spanking children for behavior that is natural and normal for their age may make them afraid to try things.
- ▶ Children who are spanked learn that it is acceptable to hit people.
- ▶ Spanking can make a child feel as though he or she is a bad person.

Leader Resource

Game Situations

1. Your three-month-old son cries a lot. The baby's mother tells you not to pick him up so much because you'll spoil him.
2. Your 18-month-old daughter can get stubborn at times. In the morning when you need to get to work or school, she often refuses to leave the house to go to the babysitter's.
3. Whenever you take your two-year-old daughter to the grocery store, she has a tantrum when you go past the candy aisle.
4. Your son is about to turn two. Whenever you have company, he refuses to share anything with other children. This embarrasses you.
5. You are visiting your girlfriend's house with your two-and-a-half-year-old son. Your girlfriend has a four-year-old daughter. While playing, your son takes away the girl's favorite toy, and she starts to cry.
6. When you take your three-year-old son to the basketball court with you, he often gets tired and begins to whine.
7. Your nine-month-old daughter puts anything and everything into her mouth.
8. Your two-year-old daughter wants to play with her younger brother, who is six months old. She likes to touch the baby's face, and to kiss and hug him. Some times she hugs him roughly and sticks her fingers in his eyes as she names the parts of his face.
9. You, your grandmother, and your four-year-old daughter are walking down the street. An elderly woman walks by and bumps into your daughter without saying "excuse me." Before you know it, your daughter calls the woman an "asshole."

10. Every day for a week, your six-year-old daughter comes home from school and tells you that she forgot her books to do her homework.
11. Your ten-year-old son comes home from school without the new jacket you recently bought him. He says that he took it off while he was playing basketball and that somebody stole it. You've told him a hundred times not to wear the jacket to school.
12. Your 12-year-old son has been suspended from school for the third time because he disrupted the classroom.
13. Your 17-year-old daughter has been fired from her job because she had been late every day for a week. You are counting on her to help pay for her college tuition, because you've been out of work for two months.
14. Your seven-year-old son gets furious at his five-year-old-brother for messing with his things, and so he breaks his brother's bike.
15. Your 14-year-old daughter has come home late every Saturday night for the last month. It's now Saturday again, and she asks you whether she can go to a party.
16. Your 15-year-old son was arrested for shoplifting with a group of his friends. He did not have any store merchandise in his possession, but his friends did. You have already talked with him about his friends' negative influences on him.

Leader Resource

Role-Play Situations

The underlined names are the characters to be role-played in each situation.

1. Jarrold goes to pick up his three-year-old son, Jay, who is visiting his grandmother. Jay is happy to see his dad, but he doesn't want to leave with him. When Jarrold tries to take Jay firmly by the hand and lead him out of the house, Jay holds onto his grandmother and screams, "No, I don't want to go with you!"
2. This is the first time that Mike has brought his two-year-old daughter, Sia, to the babysitter's house. When Mike arrives, Mrs. Jackson is busy, so he begins a conversation with Mr. Jackson. While Mike is talking, Sia clings to his legs. Mike tries to ignore her, but she climbs into his lap, puts her hands over his eyes, and puts her face in front of his, trying to get his attention. Embarrassed by Sia's behavior in front of Mr. Jackson, Mike tries to push her away. Sia begins to hit Mike's legs and to scream and cry in a full-blown tantrum.
3. Keith has taken his five-year-old daughter, Claudette, out for the day. Keith's new girlfriend, Sherise, is also with them. Claudette has been rude to Sherise off and on, ignoring her and demanding her father's attention. Finally Sherise says to Claudette, "I don't think you like me very much." Claudette gets right in Sherise's face and says, "You're right. Why should I like you? My momma says you're not nice, and I think so, too."
4. Donnell lives with his mother and his three-year-old son, Chris. Chris calls his grandmother "Mom." Today, Chris is riding his tricycle in the living room, and Donnell screams at him to stop. Chris sasses back, "Don't you yell at me. I'm telling Mom."
5. Stewart receives a call from his 11-year-old son's teacher, saying that Tony has not done his homework assignments for the past three days. When Tony comes home from school, Stewart asks him whether he has any homework. Tony lies and says that he doesn't have any.

6. Adrian's seven-year-old-daughter, Sasha, is staying with him for the weekend. On Saturday, Adrian's girlfriend, Nancy, shows up at his apartment with her six-year-old daughter, Tiffany. Sasha takes one look at Tiffany and says, "I'm not playing with *her*. *She's* retarded."
7. Joseph's 16-year-old daughter, Melissa, asks her father whether she can go to a party at her friend Maria's house. When she assures him that Maria's mother will be there to keep an eye on things, Joseph agrees to let her go. At two o'clock in the morning, Joseph gets a call from a police officer. Melissa and six of her friends have been arrested for drinking and for trashing Maria's house.

Feedback/Wrap-up

Begin by reviewing these important points from today's session:

- Children's ability to control their behavior improves as they get older, but most children cannot be expected to have self-control until they are at least four or five years old.
- Parents' efforts to correct their child's behavior should take into account the age and abilities of the child.
- Efforts to control behavior by hitting, intimidation, and yelling make children feel bad about themselves and often reinforce negative behavior. Children who are physically or emotionally hurt by their parents usually end up being aggressive, passive, or withdrawn.
- To help their children behave in desirable ways, parents need to develop a positive emotional relationship with them.

Ask the following questions to help the participants express what they got out of today's session.

▼ Discussion Questions

1. Would anybody like to share his reactions to today's session?
2. Did you learn any new ways to manage your children's behavior today? If so, what did you learn?
3. For those of you who have custody of your children, do you plan to try any of the alternatives to hitting that were suggested today? If so, which ideas about discipline will you try?
4. For those of you who share the responsibility of raising your children with others (such as their mother), do you anticipate any problems in using these new methods of correcting behavior? If so, what problems do you expect? What steps can you take to involve other people in your efforts to manage your children's behavior?
5. For those of you who do not visit your children regularly, was today's session helpful? What did you learn today that you can use when you do visit your children?

Concluding the Session. Remind the fathers that changing children's behavior takes time. Children who are used to being treated in a certain way may have trouble adjusting to their parents' new approaches. Parents need to be consistent and honest with their children. In the long run, children will welcome a relationship with parents who make them feel good about themselves and who allow them to control their own behavior.

Summarize the three sessions (7, 8, and 9) that deal with their children's needs by reminding the men of what they've discussed. Say something like, "You've spent quite a bit of time talking and learning about your role and responsibility as fathers and about what your children need from you. In Session 7, you thought about what you *value* in your children and about how to respond to them in ways that encourage them to develop the characteristics and traits that you think are important in life. In Session 8, you talked about how to deal with the day-to-day situations that come up when taking care of your kids, and you exchanged ideas about how to improve the time you spend with them. Finally, today you explored ways to respond to your children's behavior without yelling, hitting, or otherwise harming them."

To get the fathers’ reactions to the work they have done, ask, “Did the three sessions help you to understand your children better? If so, how? Do you think that your relationship with your children will improve, given what you have learned? If so, how? What are the most important things you have learned in Sessions 7, 8, and 9?”

Tell the men that learning how to be a good father is a lifelong process. Each day will bring new challenges and, it is hoped, new rewards. Inform them about local parenting groups and classes, and encourage them to attend. Finally, thank the men for their participation, and tell them that the next two sessions will focus on their other relationships — with adults. Ask them to prepare for Session 10 by thinking about their relationships with people who are important to them, including their partners, their parents, their friends, and their coworkers. What’s good about these relationships? What would they like to change in these relationships?